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The Roger Sherman Debate Society

The Roger Sherman Debate Society (RSDS) is WestConn's debate team. The RSDS hosts public and parliamentary debates on WestConn's campus, moderate debates, and participates in competitive team debate tournaments that are sanctioned by the Cross Examination Debate Association. They are an organization that participates in debate both at WCSU and throughout the nation. Debate competition includes traveling to universities around the nation and competing against peers from almost every university in the country.

The RSDS has had the opportunity to debate students from the following universities:

Cornell University	Marist College
United States Military Academy	Liberty University
University at Rochester	Oklahoma State University
United States Naval Academy	Howard University
Boston College	West Virginia University
University of Vermont	Kansas State
State University of New York	Bard College

Tournaments

Sept. 29-30	Vermont
Oct. 19-21	West Point
Nov. 17-18	Rochester
Jan. 2-4	CSU-Fullerton
Jan. 12-14	UC-Berkley
Jan. 25-27	US Naval Academy
Feb. 2-3	Baruch
Feb. 9-10	Cornell
Mar. 1-3	Northwest CEDA Championship

Dr. Harold Schramm's 2007 Commencement Address Excerpts

I am honored to have been asked to say something to you this morning, though I was explicitly told to speak for no more than 15 minutes. I'll try to be painlessly brief, to the point, and not entirely dull. I consider myself a representative of all members of the faculty and staff who are student advocates, who respect the individuals who are entrusted to our care, and who have dedicated their careers to "changing lives," a phrase which now embodies all our efforts here at WestConn under Dr. Schmotter. We are proudly a student-centered teaching institution.

You move on to seek your passion and your fortune. I go off to retirement after 39 years of teaching, 38 here at WestConn (think of it, I have been here for more than one-third of the university's existence!). I came directly from graduate school in 1969 to teach English literature, and moved to JLA with Frank Muska in 1980, where I have remained until today teaching law to undergraduates. And it has been a great ride. I have always appreciated being here and I have loved every minute of my tenure. I have learned so much from each of you and from those students who preceded you. You have taught me the virtues of honesty and common sense. You have made me recognize the necessity, at times, of healthy disrespect. You and all of my colleagues on the faculty and in the administration have taught me the value of open dialogue. On this very point, Justice William O. Douglas of the U.S. Supreme Court has written that, "The most important aspect of freedom of speech is freedom to learn. All education is a continuous dialogue — questions and answers that pursue every problem on the horizon. That is the essence

of academic freedom." We have shared that endeavor and engaged in continuous dialogue inside and outside of the classroom. It hasn't been a process of my distributing cubic zirconia of wisdom, but a collaborative journey toward Hegelian truth. You have taught me not to take myself or the world too seriously; and you have reminded me of the saving significance of a sense of humor. I am truly grateful to all of you.

All faculty members, as you know, have their own special interests, and all of us now face a consistent and overwhelming expansion of knowledge. It seems that we are always at a turning point these days. Soon it is feared books will be obsolete. Our fragile environment is threatened by global warming, our concepts of state and nation are in flux and even notions of family, marriage and personhood are evolving. It's a tough job just to keep up, to say nothing of envisioning and forming the future. But at the same time it is a challenge and an opportunity. Every discipline is reorganizing, as the unthinkable becomes commonplace. I need only say the word Google to symbolize the reorganization of information and the explosion of knowledge. We never heard this word before the computer revolution and now it's a commonly used verb. (I'll Google his name to see what he's done.)

One of my heroes, Associate Justice William Brennan of the Supreme Court, author of the famous liberal decision which allowed flag burning as a form of protest, and persistent critic with Justice Thurgood Marshall of the death penalty, wrote that this First Amendment gave us our society, and the other provisions of the Bill of Rights only embellish it. He saw the First Amendment as the enabling principle which permits and protects our existence and development as individuals. It deserves its preferred position among our rights because in truth you can't be anyone or do anything without the protection of free speech. That's only a third of the argument, however. There are two other dimensions to this priceless liberty, and they raise the balancing claims from a so-called Bill of Responsibilities, and the oft neglected realization that sometimes it's better to listen than to speak.

The First Amendment gives us the legal basis to preserve and protect the American way of life. BUT it comes with responsibilities which are especially important now and which apply directly to you. An emphasis on rights alone will lead to destructive selfishness and destructive abuse of our system. Aquinas held that peace stops when everyone seeks what is their own. So I am recommending ultimately that you see the Bill of Rights balanced by a Bill of Responsibilities. This idea has been advanced by many and it is crucially important in regard to the First Amendment where a balance between liberty and license is so important. Recognizing that with rights come responsibilities, the Freedom Foundation, along with Judith Rose and others, has proposed a formal statement. Its Preamble sets the tone: "Freedom and responsibility are mutual and inseparable; we can ensure enjoyment of the one by exercising the other. Freedom for all of us depends on responsibility by each of us. To secure and expand our liberties, therefore, we accept [these] responsibilities as individual members of society."

The statement goes on to list several areas of active citizen involvement balancing the first 10 amendments. The second of these is especially relevant here. It proposes that we "respect the rights and beliefs of others. In a free society diversity flourishes. Courtesy and consideration toward others are measures of a civilized society."

Our Connecticut State Constitution, a remarkable document in its own right, anticipates this expression of mutually dependent obligation. It has its own free speech provision which provides that "Every citizen may freely speak, write and publish his sentiments on all subjects, being responsible for the abuse of that liberty."

Finally, remember that the right to speak carries with it a concomitant obligation to listen; to be open to the ideas and opinions of others and to really hear them. Speech implies the right not to speak and sometimes it is better to remain silent and to absorb the sounds that surround us. As listeners your obligation is to avoid prejudgment and to reject prior restraint of statements until they are made. You must allow ideas to come forth freely and to be tested in the marketplace of ideas. Learned Hand, famous federal judge from New York's Second Circuit reminded us that, "The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which seeks to understand the minds of other men and women." Hear them and good speech will survive. And so you must also be active listeners; you must be prepared to understand comments in context; to hear not only denotation but also connotation. Listening is often as important as speaking, and sometimes more important.